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The Secretary of State to President Wilson

WASHINGTON, August 20, 1917.

MY DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: After a careful analysis of the Pope's appeal to the belligerents²⁶ I am of the opinion that it practically goes no further than the German peace proposal of last December,²⁷ that is, it amounts merely to an invitation to negotiate. The chief difference lies in a preliminary agreement to restore Belgian independence in exchange for the restoration of Germany's colonies, to erect an independent state out of "part of the old Kingdom of Poland" (meaning, probably, Russian Poland), and a general condoning of the wrongs committed, though in particular cases a modification according to "justice and equity". Everything else, even the sovereignty of the Balkan States, is left to negotiation.

Belgian independence and the recreation of Poland were at the time of the German proposal in December considered to be essential to any restoration of peace, so that the only new basis suggested is the waiving by all parties of the losses sustained by them respectively. Except in East Prussia, Galicia and Bukowina (territories which have been reconquered) the Central Powers have not suffered from invasion and hostile occupation. They have little to forgive.

On the other hand neutral Belgium has been grievously outraged and her people impoverished, brutally treated, even enslaved. Would it be just to deny the Belgians the right to claim full reparation for all they have lost through three years of German occupation? Serbia and Montenegro have, from all we can learn, been treated with equal, if not with greater harshness. Are they not entitled to be indemnified for all that they have endured? Roumania also has suffered though in a less degree.

Is the enormous damage done by the German invaders in northern France not even to be paid in part, though much of the damage was the result of wantonness? Is the lawless destruction of hundreds of merchant vessels by German submarines to be condoned?

If I read the Pope's appeal aright, all these questions are to be answered in the affirmative. It is carrying the Christian doctrine of forgiveness a long way, since the burden falls very heavily on one side and very lightly on the other. The suggestion is lacking in justice and reciprocity.

The effort of the German Government through its December note was to induce the Allied Powers to meet the Central Alliance in

²⁶ For correspondence previously printed on this subject, see *Foreign Relations*, 1917, supp. 2, vol. I, pp. 161-228.

²⁷ See *ibid.*, 1916, supp., pp. 85 ff.

conference to negotiate on the basis of the *status quo ante bellum*. And that is all that the Pope's appeal does, except that Russian Poland is to be given independence. With slight changes of territory here and there amounting to a rectification of boundaries, I do not see that there is to be any material change from the political conditions which existed prior to the war and which resulted in the war.

As to the methods of insuring a continuance of peace, which are suggested for negotiation, their adoption depends largely upon the trustworthiness of the signatories to the peace treaty. In view of the violation of Belgian neutrality, the disregard of human rights, the promises broken by the German Government, I do not see how it is possible to rely upon the good faith of that Government as it is now constituted. It would be folly to expect it to change its character or to abandon its cherished ambitions. To make peace by accepting guarantees from the military rulers of Germany would only be to postpone the struggle not to end it.

I think it necessary to consider the motives which inspired the Pope's appeal or the influences which induced him to make it at this particular time, when the military tide of the Central Powers is at the flood, when the submarine warfare appears to be most menacing, when the power of the United States is just beginning to be exerted, when Russia has not yet gained her equilibrium, when a vigorous peace propaganda in this country and other countries is being pressed and when the socialistic bodies are being employed, as at Stockholm, to demand an end of the war. I would only say that the Pope, probably unwittingly or out of compassion for Austria-Hungary, has become in this matter the agent of Germany.

In a word then the Pope's appeal appears to me to be but a renewal of the German proposal to negotiate and a suggestion of a peace based on the *status quo ante*. The proposal to negotiate has already been declined by the Allies. The suggested basis must of course be rejected by all.

Faithfully yours,

ROBERT LANSING

841.51/80a

The Secretary of State to the Secretary of the Treasury (McAdoo)

WASHINGTON, August 20, 1917.

DEAR MR. SECRETARY: In view of your letter of the 14th³⁸ sending me the correspondence in relation to a proposed letter to be sent by

³⁸ For text of this letter and of the preceding correspondence, see *Hearings Before the Special Committee Investigating the Munitions Industry, United States Senate, 74th Cong., 2d sess.* (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1936), pp. 8999-9001.